



Health Advisory

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Media Contact:
Jana Kettering
Public Information Officer
801-538-6339

Utah Public Health Officials Prioritize Remaining Influenza Vaccine and Urge Sick Utahns to Stay Home

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah continues to experience high levels of influenza activity throughout the state. To date, the statewide lab-confirmed and rapid testing case total is 3,068 cases*. Because of the earlier-arriving influenza season, vaccine supplies have been highly utilized and are now extremely limited. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is advising health care providers to prioritize the remaining doses to assure that those at highest risk receive the vaccine.

The UDOH has been tracking vaccine supplies throughout the state over the last several weeks. The UDOH estimates that a few thousand doses remain in Utah in the public and private healthcare system – but this can change quickly day-to-day. Doctors are urged to follow vaccine priorities and offer vaccine to those at highest risk of complications from influenza. Utah will receive one more order of 1,100 doses from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which will be provided to local health departments.

On Thursday, the CDC issued vaccine recommendations to help states prioritize the remaining influenza vaccine supplies. Utah has prioritized any remaining vaccine for these priority groups:

- adults 65 years and older (also recommended for this group is the pneumonia vaccine, which is in good supply.)
- healthy children between 6 months and 23 months of age
- persons with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, HIV, asthma, etc.
- pregnant women in the second or third trimester

If you are in one of the priority groups, call your healthcare provider to determine if vaccine supplies are available.

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After those at highest risk of complications are vaccinated, the next priority group is those in close contact with high-risk individuals. Healthy persons ages 5-49 years are encouraged to be vaccinated with the more available nasal vaccine, often called Flu Mist.

Antiviral medications can be used to treat or prevent illness in persons at high risk for complications from influenza. Antiviral medications are prescribed by a doctor.

The UDOH tracks the number of lab-confirmed or rapid flu tests to indicate the beginning and severity of the influenza season and where it occurs in the state. There are 38 tracking clinics in the state that consistently report influenza activity. The number of cases indicates that flu is widespread in Utah but that number does not account for all those who are sick from influenza in Utah. The rate of “influenza-like illness” is at 11.8 percent, which is higher than either of the past two years. Influenza-like illness rates are an average for the week from 38 Utah practices where doctors see high and low levels of influenza-like illness.

Three types of influenza are circulating in Utah. The strain that is circulating is primarily Influenza A, with a handful of Influenza B cases.

Absenteeism in Utah schools was at 6.6 percent for the previous week. However, it was slightly higher the week before likely due to the Thanksgiving Holiday. Last year’s peak absenteeism rate was 6 percent. Health officials urge school and business leaders to support the “stay home if you are sick” message to minimize the spread of influenza.

The UDOH has received three reports of influenza deaths in Utah. Influenza deaths are formally tracked at the national level but this does not capture all deaths from influenza. Nationally, there are around 30,000 deaths each year associated with influenza. It is difficult to draw conclusions from individual deaths since many who die from Influenza also have complicating conditions that made them more vulnerable to influenza.

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Since the vaccine is very limited and not much more is expected, Utahns should practice “respiratory etiquette” to prevent the spread of influenza and other infectious diseases.

The UDOH recommends:

- Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing; throw the tissue away immediately and wash hands thoroughly.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizers when unable to wash.
- Rinse and dry hands with a disposable towel. Use towel to turn off the faucet.
- Stay home from work, school, church, social functions and public gatherings if you have flu-like symptoms.
- Refrain from visiting friends or family if you have flu-like symptoms.
- Eliminate casual contact such as shaking hands.
- Ask for a mask when entering doctors’ offices, emergency rooms or other healthcare buildings.

The UDOH recommends that high-risk individuals also receive the pneumonia vaccine because pneumonia is a life-threatening complication resulting from influenza.

Pneumonia vaccine can be given year round and is usually given just once in a lifetime.

Supplies of pneumonia vaccine are stable at this time.

Media briefings may be called when there are significant messages to be reported. The media should continue to seek influenza updates on Tuesdays and Fridays at

www.health.utah.gov.

*Flu totals are an indicator that allow public health to track onset and provide a message of severity. Flu numbers provided in this release are not intended to represent all cases of influenza in the community.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.